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'The hospital is not your larder': Representing the NHS in BBC TV's Being Human

The BBC tv show *Being Human* (2008-2013) written by Toby Whithouse follows the stories of three supernatural entities – a werewolf, a ghost and a vampire - trying to live 'normal' human lives in a flat in Bristol. At first glance this series seems an unlikely focus for an examination of how the NHS is represented on television except that George (the werewolf) and Mitchell (the vampire) have jobs as a porter and a cleaner in the local hospital, St Judes. George explains their choices as Mitchell 'isn't that good with light' and the corridors offer miles of walkways without natural daylight. Their jobs are also low profile and part of their efforts to 'blend in' to human society. Even these apparently incidental factors have something significant to express about the NHS and how it is perceived. It will be argued that the NHS is a 'place' within the 'life world' which provides a sense of what Moores terms "at-homeness" (2012, 54). Place is achieved through routine practices which become so familiar they become taken for granted and attached to emotions. As Moores states place is "more than simply spatial location." (2010, 174) Within the diegesis of *Being Human* that sense of at-homeness is both relied upon and disrupted.

This chapter aims to examine events and key plots centred around the hospital and staff and to consider the impact of the representation. Since the 1950's, television has repeatedly dramatized the NHS. As Jason Jacobs points out, "The advantage of the hospital setting is that it is a ready-made receptacle for a variety of dramatic situations" (2008, 34). In *Being Human* the supernatural element of the drama adds additional layers of meaning and possibility as the hospital is a liminal space at the boundary between life and death. Within the first 10 minutes a vampire intruder, Seth, tries to drink blood from an unconscious patient. He picks up and reads the hospital notes to check the patient's blood type before feeding. In other scenes the ordinariness of George and Mitchell's jobs are apparent when they are seen mopping floors and wheeling patients about. In another scene, George transforms into his werewolf state and kills Herrick in the hospital's isolation room. It is the careful type of detail and the everydayness of the representation of the hospital which adds to the verisimilitude and simultaneously acts as a counterbalance for some of the supernatural storylines where violent action occurs. As a narrative asset the NHS setting grounds the other worldly activity in something known and authentic.

Keywords: NHS, Representation, *Being Human* tv series, place